



Prairie Update

A publication of Saskatchewan Watershed Authority Volume 21 Fall 2004



Photos from upper left clockwise:

Ross Macdonald, a rangeland agrologist with the Watershed Authority, shares his knowledge of grass species with teachers on a prairie tour.

Tamela Burgess welcomes visitors to the "Old Porch Gallery" on her ranch in the Big Muddy area.

Orin Balas and daughters organize lunch at their ranch near Ponteix.



In this issue of the Prairie Update, we are showcasing community involvement in the field of environmental education. Lifelong learning begins in childhood in an environment much broader than the classroom. Learning is not restricted to lessons in a textbook, but also takes place in family and community interactions throughout a lifetime.

We are pleased with the opportunities we have had to partner with our prairie stewards, 4-H groups, members of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan, Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan Inc., various community associations and teachers in order to support and foster quality learning experiences in rural Saskatchewan.

A community based learning environment is key to understanding different perspectives, building bridges



between generations, and forging alliances between rural and urban communities.

We hope you enjoy this issue which profiles • a group of teachers from various parts of the province who participated in "Prairie Grandeur" (a five day workshop and tour in southwest Saskatchewan) • 4-H activities focusing on range management • the annual

Eco-X school tour (a stewardship education program delivered to elementary schools) • and a round-up of Watershed Tours which took place over the summer in the south central part of the province.

The Editor

4-H Clubs Learn About Prairie Habitat

This summer the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Society for Range Management developed a study guide to teach 4-H club members the value of rangeland resources, and prepared an exam focusing primarily on plant identification for the annual 4-H provincial competition. A bonus question asked "Why might rangelands be important in Saskatchewan?"

About 45 young people aged 14 to 19 representing six 4-H regions participated in the competition hosted by The Weyburn Agriculture Society. John Grant from Edam, Saskatchewan received the highest marks and was awarded a \$300 scholarship by Ducks Unlimited Canada. John is currently studying Environmental Conservation and Reclamation at Vermillion College in Alberta. His bonus question is featured on this page.

Bonus Question: The Importance of Rangelands in Saskatchewan

Rangelands are very important to Saskatchewan because they consist of many important plants which provide shelter and food for wildlife. They also are a major part of our economy. Rangelands are used by ranchers to provide grazing for cattle, sheep and other livestock. A rangeland is made up of native grasses which when managed poorly can be weakened and give invader (or non native) plants a chance to move in and choke out the native species.

If rangelands aren't managed properly, then they will not have optimal production and could endanger wildlife survival in that area. Once a rangeland is harmed it is almost impossible to re-establish.

By John Grant



Photo courtesy of Marie Grant

John Grant



Julie Korol with Southwest 4-H members Abbie and Alisha Beach

Learn To Do By Doing

Over the past three years, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority partnered with the Society for Range Management to deliver activity sessions at the annual Southwest 4-H camp held on the banks of the Swift Current Creek. The Southwest 4-H camp provides a fun atmosphere in which to learn about

watersheds and the prairie environment. One hundred and ten campers, aged nine to fifteen, came from areas in the Frenchman Creek, Missouri Coteau, Great Sandhills and as far north as the North Saskatchewan River for five jam packed days this summer.

Julie Korol, a rangeland agrologist with the Watershed Authority, joined the

group as a session leader. "Camp was made even better because of the 17 year old counselors, four great cooks and nine staff members," says Julie. "It seemed like we had been friends forever."

"In the activity session I led, we spent time walking around native prairie habitat, talking about what is important about prairie, water and different habitat types, doing a prairie habitat scavenger hunt and playing Oh! Deer," continued Julie. The game and scavenger hunt were adapted from Project Wild - a program recommended by Saskatchewan Learning.

Highlights of the activities included finding a nest on the ground in a sagebrush plant, seeing garter snakes, finding snake skins and catching crayfish. For a special treat, the Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards came out to the camp one afternoon and introduced the campers to a water monitoring program called Water Watchdog.

"Return campers still talk about things they learned in past years" says Julie, "as well as throwing the instructor in the creek. I can't wait to go back next year!"

Prairie Conservation Action Plan Delivers Elementary School Programs

"We had another busy year delivering our stewardship education programs to elementary school audiences," says Karyn Scalise, Manager of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) in Regina. "Last year we delivered the Eco-X program to 1450 students at ten schools in Swift Current and area." The Eco-X program is delivered in partnership with the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Grasslands National Park, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre and Nature Saskatchewan.

The Owls and Cows Tour delivered by the Watershed Authority and the Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre reached 6,375 students from grades three to six in schools roughly bounded by the communities of Lloydminster, Melfort and Quill Lake.

"In 2005, we plan to deliver Eco-X to schools in Grasslands National Park and Manitou Sand Hills areas," says Karyn. "We will also be offering the Cows, Fish, Cattle Dogs and Kids Game Show in November at Fall Fair in Saskatoon and Canadian Western Agribition Agri-Ed Showcase in Regina. Be sure to come by and check it out!"

Mat Muhly (*Muhlenbergia richardsonis*) is a perennial that grows from underground stems, accounting for its mat-forming growth habit. Unlike prairie muhly, mat muhly has no scaly base and the leaf blades tend to be narrower. Mat muhly is a warm season grass, beginning growth later in the spring and forming flowers and seeds later in the summer than do the cool season grasses which dominate our prairies. Mat muhly is found in moist and often alkaline sites across the prairies.



John Fahiman, a hydrogeological engineer with the Watershed Authority, gave a presentation on the geologic history of the Moose Mountains, and how this has affected the area's groundwater including Kenosee Lake.

Discovering the Moose Mountains

A workshop and field tour held during Native Prairie Appreciation Week in late June, attracted over 100 participants. Based out of Arcola, the workshop featured a variety of presentations on the ecology, history, and management issues in the Moose Mountain area. Participants also teamed up on the 2004 Native Plant Identification challenge held at the Brickley Ranch, and were given a crash course on assessing range health at Tecumseh Pasture.

The purpose of the event was to bring together ranchers, native plant enthusiasts, birders, naturalists, hunters and resource agency specialists to share their knowledge and celebrate the diverse values of native prairie and its importance to the agricultural and environmental sectors in Saskatchewan.



Photo courtesy of PCAP

Cows, Fish, Cattle Dogs and Kids Game Show at Canadian Western Agribition

Grasslands Grandeur Tour

During the week of July 5 – 9th, 25 teachers from as far as Prince Albert, Paradise Hill, Broadview and Invermay traveled a 1134 km route as part of a tour called "Grasslands Grandeur." This tour, which included stops at conservation areas and ranches, was designed to help teachers explore the native prairie ecosystem and develop a better understanding of landowner stewardship. Information shared through this tour is being used to develop a classroom resource for all Saskatchewan schools.

A Way of Life



Following Trails through the Popescul Ranch near Wood Mountain

To gain first hand knowledge about practices that benefit the health of grassland and wetland environments, the teachers were joined by a number of "experts" including range agrologists, biologists and ranchers who covered a variety of topics including plant identification, range assessments, planned grazing and watering systems, livestock selection and endangered species as well as "prairie history and culture".

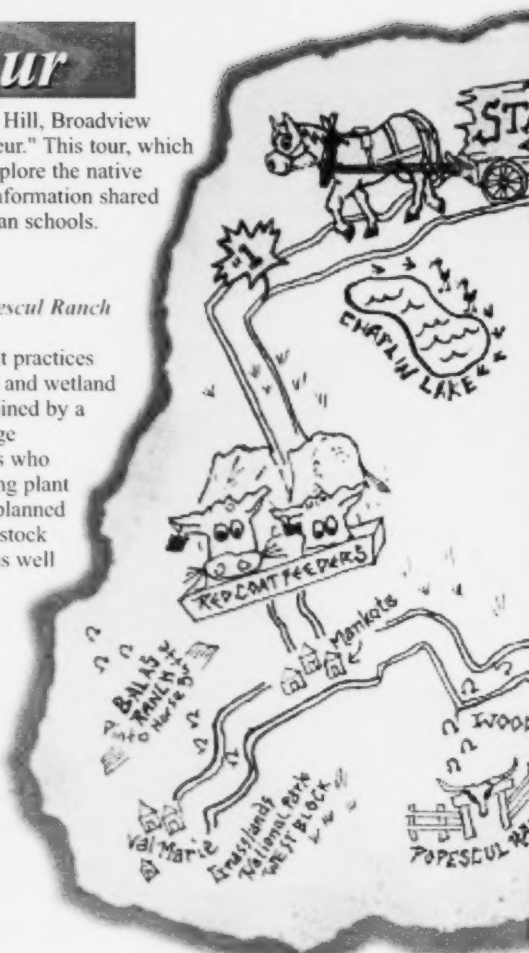
Healthy Water



Kelly Perepeluk-Nieckar of Roma looks for pond critters during session on aquatic health. Technical expertise on the tour was provided by Ross Macdonald, (Watershed Authority/ Ducks Unlimited), Daryl Nazar, (Ducks Unlimited), Kerry LaForge (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration), Karyn Sealise (Prairie Conservation Action Plan), and Barb Hanbidge (Ducks Unlimited). Sheila Friesen from Agriculture in the Classroom did much of the event organizing with help from her staff, Ruth Kessler and Shauna Gossen. Based on this tour, Agriculture in the Classroom and Saskatchewan Learning will be compiling a K-12 Grasslands Curriculum Guide. It will include case studies and activities provided by Lizbeth Nicholls and Tracy Harrison of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

Teachers hone their range assessment skills at the Burgess Ranch in the Big Muddy

Tour participants learned about all facets of the cattle industry with stops including Red Coat Cattle Feeders at Hazenmore and the Orin and Doris Balas Ranch at Ponteix – followed by a guided horseback and wagon tour of "ranching country" in the Wood Mountain region. The wagon tour was hosted by Wade and Louise Popescul with tremendous help from the families of Clint and Dawn Mitchell and Mark Elford. To wind up their five-day trip, the teachers moved eastward to the ranch of Michael and Tamela Burgess at Big Beaver – and finally to Radville, where they met Murray and Selena McGillivray (2002) recipients of The Environmental Stewardship Award sponsored by the Saskatchewan Stockgrowers Association.



Healthy Grasslands



"Teacherage" original teacher's residence on the Balas Ranch near Ponteix
 The Grasslands Tour, coordinated by Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan Inc., was sponsored by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, Agriculture Institute of Management in Saskatchewan, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Saskatchewan Stockgrowers Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan, National Research Council of Canada, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and Saskatchewan Learning.



Tour Map



Partners in Learning

Shared Benefits



Jeff and Rhonda Morari of Saskatoon at Grasslands National Park

The connection between landowner stewardship and "special species and spaces" was incorporated in the tour through visits to the Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre at Moose Jaw, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site at Chaplin, Grasslands National Park at Val Marie and a Ducks Unlimited Canada prairie restoration project at Kayville.

Prairie Culture



Thelma Poirier discusses Wood Mountain ranching history and grassland culture

From start to finish, grassland history and culture was a big part of this tour. Starting in Moose Jaw, participants were introduced to the cowboy poetry of Bill Gomersall, Ken Mitchell and "Slim" Mitchell. At the Wood Mountain Regional Park, the group toured the Rodeo Ranch Museum and NWMP Museum. Here, presentations by Thelma Poirier and Judy Fitzpatrick were followed with a "moving" program featuring the music and poetry of Clint and Dawn Mitchell, Mark Elford and Decody Cortier. Further on in the Big Muddy Badlands, ranchers Michael and Tamela Burgess welcomed visitors to their "Old Porch Gallery" and shared tales about the famed "Outlaw Trail". Rounding out their experience of life in the west, the group also visited Aust's General Store and the Nature Centre at Big Beaver.

The Roots of Education

"I think awareness is the beginning of education for a lot of people. This awareness is just the beginning of wanting to learn more."

Carol Belanger, Indian Head

Like Carol Belanger, who participated in the Grasslands Grandeur tour this summer, many teachers said they took a greater interest in the ranching industry when they saw things from the other side of the fence.

"It was just a whole different level of education for me," said Rhonda Morari, a Grade 6 teacher at Mother Theresa Elementary School in Saskatoon.

"...Because you take it for granted. You drive by a ranch and you see all the cattle in the field, but you don't really give it a second thought."

"When you actually meet face to face with a producer – that throws a whole new spin on everything. There's more of a personal relationship."

Since the tour, Rhonda said her interest in rural Saskatchewan has grown. "I've become more attuned to what's happening and I do listen to the news differently."

In particular, Rhonda said she appreciates the conservation ethic that has been passed down among multi-generational ranch operations. In order to survive in the days when feed couldn't be moved and range agrologists were unheard of, ranchers worked in tune with nature to ensure they had a grazing resource for the winter and spring seasons. The value of those practices still exists today.

"There's a special ecology there that I wasn't aware of," said Rhonda. "When Murray McGillivray said 'we manage the grasses and utilize the cattle' – that was the thing that stuck with me the most. I never thought about it that way. For me, that's a total turn around. I was really impressed by him. He really made it clear to me that ranching is an art. And for me that's what a big part of this trip was all about – learning that and seeing it in practice."

Finding ways to transfer their new found knowledge to students in the classroom is something Rhonda and her colleagues are already working on. Her husband, Jeff, who teaches at St. Joseph



Murray McGillivray, prairie steward from Radville area

High School in Saskatoon was also on the tour. He noted that knowing someone else on the tour provides an outlet for sharing ideas later.

"Rhonda and I talked a lot about this and a lot of this has to happen with the kids themselves. There has to be a hands on exchange," he said. "When you ask how many kids have visited a farm or have any connection to a farm – there are fewer and fewer hands every

year. So it's certainly a challenge."

While both teachers would love to take their students on a similar trip – they are going to build upon the network of contacts they have made through this experience.

Jeff concluded, "I think what I gained from my experience is probably going to come up in various forms – undoubtedly for the rest of my career."

"For me, it's had a huge impact. And the reason is I don't come from a farming or ranching background. My perceptions of what farmers and ranchers do have been greatly changed because I didn't have a sniff about the ecology and the science and the learning that these people have to do to make their operations sustainable. Another thing that came through to me is the importance of family and community and working together. So many of the things that I thought I knew were totally reversed. I'm really impressed with everybody who we've met along the tour – by their professionalism and their passion for the land. I'm really thankful to have had this opportunity because it's places and people I would have never gotten to see or to visit, and there's just so many things I can bring back to my classroom – back to my perception about life in Saskatchewan."

Gwen Johner, Indian Head

"We need programs like this in our province. We need to love what we have here and develop it. I loved Red Coats (Cattle Feeders). That feedlot was awesome. They're so knowledgeable about feeding their animals. I loved going into the field and seeing the grasses and starting to understand their nutritional value. I loved seeing teamwork between couples... we need to see that and treasure that. I hope they do this tour again and I really, really hope that they don't change much to this tour. It's a high quality tour and I think it would be well looked upon by other western provinces."

Kelly Perepeluk-Nieckar, Rama

"I was humbled by the farmers and how they're so passionate about being stewards of the land. We were so fortunate to go to that private land and see things that most people wouldn't – and that's very special."

Doug Porcina, Prince Albert

Know Your Watershed Tours

Over the summer, members of local Advisory Committees in the North Saskatchewan, South Saskatchewan, Upper Qu'Appelle, Moose Jaw River, and Lower Souris Watersheds toured their respective regions to gain a better understanding of water useage in their watershed.

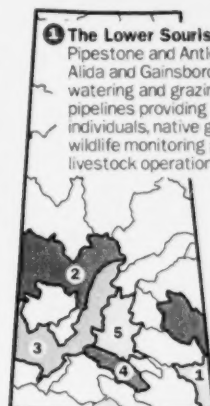
In the months ahead these Advisory Committees will be working with the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority to create watershed management plans for

the protection of source water resources. It is truly a legacy project, and we commend the volunteers for their participation. Future tours are also being planned for the Assiniboine River watershed and the Yorkton aquifer region.

If you are interested in further information on activities in your watershed, please contact Robin Tod at (306) 787-0382.



(L-R) Jeff Olson and Etienne Souloadre



1 The Lower Souris Watershed is comprised of Four Creeks, Pipestone and Antler River planning units. Two tours in the Alida and Gainsborough areas in August showcased various watering and grazing management systems, deep wells and pipelines providing water to various communities and individuals, native grass identification, water treatment, wildlife monitoring projects, pumping stations, intensive livestock operations and healthy fish populations.

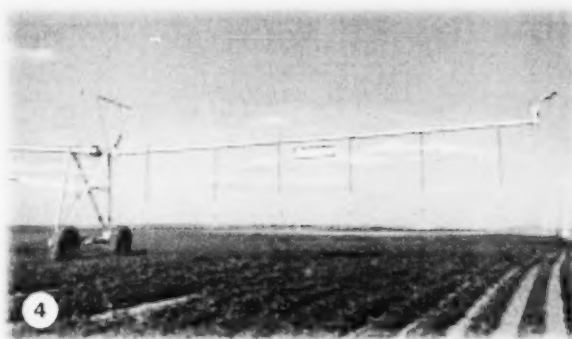
2 The North Saskatchewan watershed is divided into four planning units – East, West, Central and Battle River. Four separate tours, featuring a total of 50 stops, were offered to Committee members in late June. Highlights featured recreational lake developments, oil industry operations, DU conservation projects, large hog barns, drainage projects, salt plant, pasture management, forestry operations, landfill sites, irrigation, sewage treatment, water supply, and dams.

3 The South Saskatchewan Watershed is divided into three planning units – West, North and Lake Diefenbaker. Three tours in August focused on the management of Diefenbaker Lake levels, apportionment of the South Saskatchewan River, intensive livestock operations, water supply systems, endangered species projects, irrigation, groundwater resources and oil and gas development, municipal effluent releases, water treatment and gravel extraction.

4 The Moose Jaw River Watershed is comprised of two planning units – Thunder Creek and Moose Jaw River. Highlights of the Thunder

Creek tour included stops at the Paysen Pumpsite, the Kettlehut Outlet, projects at Pelican Lake and the Caronport Water Supply system. Stops on the Moose Jaw River tour included, the river crossing near Lang, a Burrowing Owl site near Milestone, various projects near Avonlea Creek, the Madrid drainage ditch project, and water samples at Nicole Flats.

5 The Upper Qu'Appelle River Watershed is divided into three planning units – Lanigan-Manitou, Qu'Appelle River, and Last Mountain Lake. In August, three separate tours focused on aquifer and groundwater, potash mine operations, prairie stewardship initiatives, reverse osmosis water treatment systems, Buffalo Pound Control Structure, fish passage barriers, Qu'Appelle Dam operations, riparian management, irrigation, municipal water quality and quantity, protected wildlife area, recreational areas and ecotourism projects.



Check out our website for information on:

Water Management

- Climate Conditions
- Provincial Forecast
- Stream Flows and Lake Levels
- Ground Water
- Dams and Reservoirs

Stewardship Programs

- Prairie Stewardship
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Watershed and Aquifer Planning
- Monitoring and Assessment

Education Programs

- Project Wet
- Sturgeon Outreach Program
- Project Wild
- Climate Change
- Ecotourism Programs

Publications

- Books
- Newsletters
- Forms
- Fact Sheets

Most of our publications are downloadable

Maps

- Field Demonstration Sites
- Watershed and Watershed Planning Locations
- Dams and Structures
- Easement Locations

We welcome your comments concerning our web site and invite you to share them with us. See our web site for contact information.

www.swa.ca

Share your ideas!

If you have any comments or ideas about this newsletter, please contact Sharon Metz at 787-9290 or email: sharon.metz@swa.ca

For specific information about the Prairie Stewardship Program, please contact Jennifer Lohmeyer at 787-8707 or email: jennifer.lohmeyer@swa.ca

Our Gracious Supporters



Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Agriculture Institute of Management in Saskatchewan, Inc., Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Initiative, Canada-Saskatchewan Agricultural Green Plan Agreement, Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development in Saskatchewan, Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative, National Soil and Water Conservation Program and Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration

California Waterfowl Association, Canada Millennium Partnership Program, Canadian Wildlife Service and World Wildlife Fund (Endangered Species Recovery Fund), Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Environment Canada through Eco-ACTION, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (U.S.), Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Nature Saskatchewan, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin, Pheasants Forever, Inc., (U.S.), Prairie Conservation Action Plan, Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization, Saskatchewan Energy, Saskatchewan Environment through the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund, SaskPower- Shand Greenhouse, Sask Water, TD - Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation, Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency, The Nature Conservancy (U.S.), Wildlife Habitat Canada, World Wildlife Fund, Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Coming Events

For information about the Prairie Stewardship Program please contact the following:

Moose Jaw

Jody Oliver at 694-3101

Regina

Etienne Soulodre at 787-0661

Swift Current

Bob Springer at 778-8301

Krista Connick at 778-8280

Yorkton

Jason Puckett at 786-5845

Weyburn

Ross Macdonald at 861-9893

North Battleford

Jeremy Brown at 446-7460

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